

Non-Symbolic Petroglyph Pecks: Random Particles or Purposeful Statements

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Petroglyph markings of Native American Indian cultures are currently being studied intensively as to their symbolic meanings. It is now generally considered that these petroglyphs are purposeful symbolic cultural statements. Also, the particular "symbolic" or "pictorial" glyphs are being seen as only part of the total "message"/information content.

A more holistic approach is evolving wherein the interaction of the glyphs with their immediate and surrounding rock surfaces as well as immediate and distant environs is being taken into account. Temporal interactions are now a consideration with measurements of daily, equinoxal, solstice, and lunar cycles and their interactions with the glyphs via shadows and points of light. Even cracks in the wall and apparently random "scratches" are being given serious study.

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is not to talk about the "symbolic" petroglyph pecks or scratches found on this Truckee River site, Appendix A by Alvin McLane describes the various panels which were photographed separately by the author of this article with the help of Dr. Erik Ritter and Patricia Ritter.

The glyphs and scratches were recorded with color 24 mm slides. These slides were projected on clear translucent mylar sheets and copied by hand with black ink onto the mylar sheeting, from which paper copies were made for this article.

In the process of copying the information from the slides to the mylar, the author noted that many of the peck marks found on the basalt panels appeared to be numerous and random. These marks are never mentioned in reports even though they tend to be abundant and are obviously man-made.

Recording the Pecks

The question that is being raised here is as follows: What if these supposedly random peck marks contain important cultural information that we are not currently aware of at this point in the history of petroglyphic research?

Some preliminary speculations re these random (?), and sometimes isolated peck marks, are presented as follows:

1. These pecks are excellent indicators that the other more "symbolic" looking peck configurations or scratches are indeed man-made. Looking for these neighboring random pecks is a useful tool if the "symbolic" pecks, scratches are very indeterminant in origin.
2. These "extra"/random pecks might be indicators of individual signature. An anonymous individual on a vision quest might have "said" with a mark that he

was there but did not wish to initiate a symbolic power glyph or even add on to existing symbolic power glyphs. Three pecks, three individuals.

3. They could be prayer markings or ceremony markings recording the fact that a prayer or elaborate ceremony had been held on the site.
4. It could be the signature of the artisans who worked on the "symbolic"/"power" glyphs.
5. These might be temporal indicators such as days of fasting or meditation or rites in one visit or position of the stars at that particular time of year.

Can we really afford to overlook such obviously man-made data in our recording efforts on site or in transferring data observed or photographed by hand on to mylar/paper, etc. for written reports of the over-all panel?

It is a large amount of data that we are ignoring. The ethnographic data on what the "symbolic" glyphs represent may be available and even accurate/useful. But the process of the logistics of the creation of these petroglyphic statements is more ambiguous. Individual etiquette and group processes while actually at the rocks is not really that well known for prehistoric times.

Summary

In archaeology, all "cultural" material is noted even down to fire cracked rocks, burnt pine nut seeds, fresh water shell fragments, rock debitage, minute flake fragments, etc., all contain important information of a cultural nature. Can petroglyph researchers afford to do less than this? The "random", possibly "non-symbolic" petroglyph peck marks may not be random and may have important cultural information to which we, as yet, do not have access.

Perhaps it is time to re-evaluate our recording strategies in relationship to what we have determined to be meaningless marks. Meaning is generally determined by thorough analysis and comprehensive recordation. If part of the data is left unrecorded and unmentioned, than how can thorough analysis take place?

Research is comparative. All man-make marks should be included as data somewhere on a site recording report. Determination of significance (or lack there of) is not possible if the data base is incomplete.

Examples Follow:





26-WA-2131 ARCHER SITE

Fig. 3



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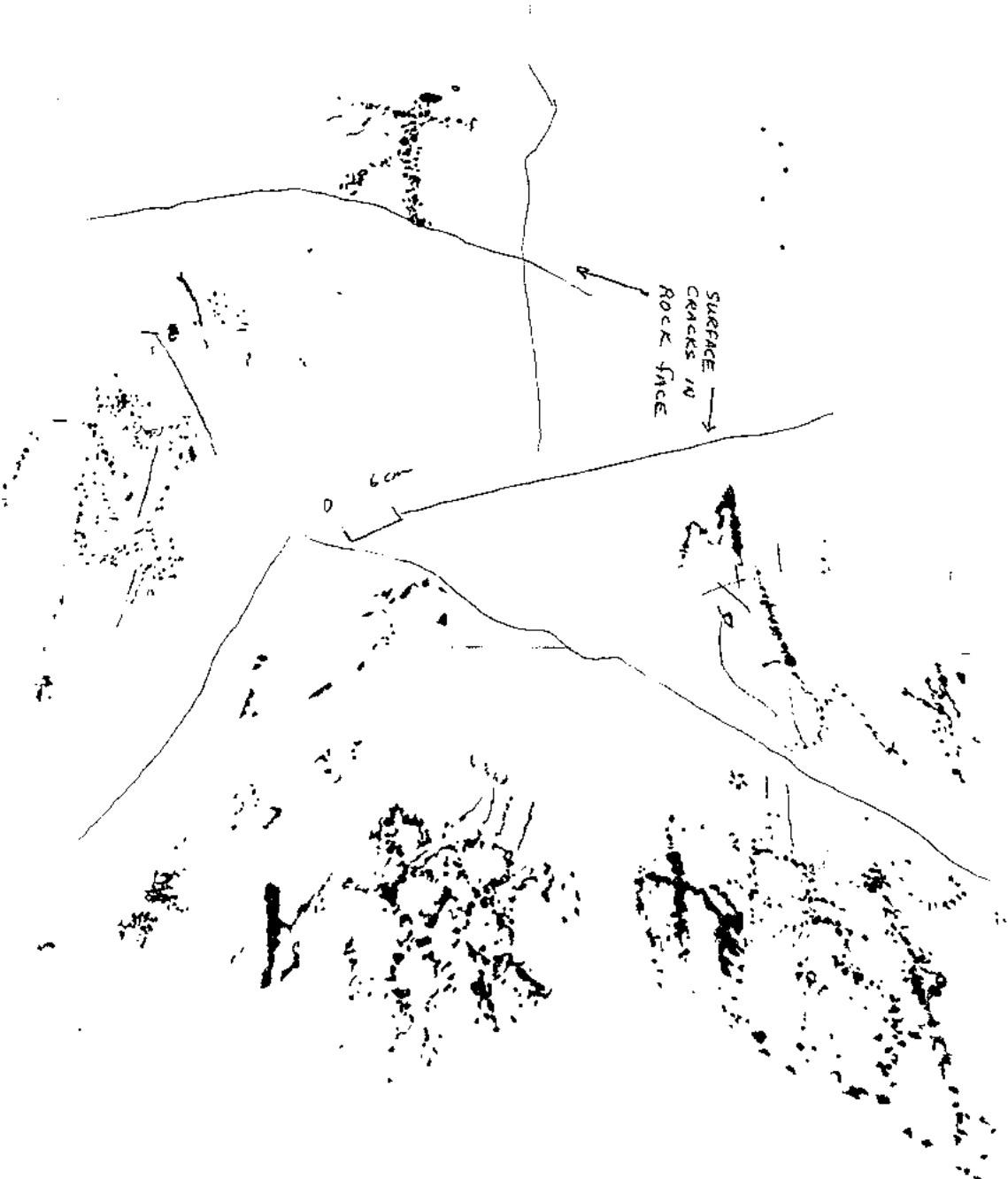
fig. 4



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fig. 5



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Appendix A - Alvin McLane

Elev. 1220 m (4364 ft.)

The Archer Site is on a several meter-long basalt cliff facing SE toward the Truckee Rivr, 427 m (1400ft.) away. The western portion of this cliff has been removed during construction of the old Central Pacific RR - the bed lies at the base of the cliff. The petroglyphs are on the lower half of the recessed portion of a 5 m (16ft) high and 18 m (58 ft) wide section of the cliff. It does not appear that the removed portion of the cliff took away any of the petroglyphs.

The display consists of six main panels of about 60 separate elements. Beginning from the west with (1), this group consists of rakes, zigzags dropping from a horizontal line and grouped ovals. Distinct vertical scratched lines are on the zigzag pattern. (2) contains vertical and horizontal zigzags. Panel (3) is a stylized archer. Area (4) is a human stick figure and upward pointed arrow. We may assume that these are relatively modern based on the fresh-looking pecked scars and being larger than nearby stick figures. Below this modern petrography is a genuine 4-pronged rake.

Panel (5) contains an asterisk, two vertical rows of human stick figures and a stick figure with a double circle. A patinated horizontal zigzag is superimposed over the stylized human forms. By degree of patination the zigzag is oldest, the asterisk is next, with the stick figures youngest.

(6) is the most eastern panel and is significant for its vertical row of three mountain sheep climbing upward, a phallus archer, two other human figures (one quite stylized), two rakes, a pecked left hand and other curvilinear designs.

Some scratches at the site may be modern. The letter M has been chiseled on the rock twice, and also the initials OVA.

This site was shown to me by my brother Donald McLane on January 20, 1985. It was previously recorded by a University of California crew and noted by Elizabeth Budy in 1979. The site is relatively well known by local residents.

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